

The Progress and Development
of the Colored People of
our Nation

An Address delivered before the American Missionary
Association, Wednesday evening, October
21, 1908, at Galesburg, Illinois.

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*Mr. President and Members of the American Missionary
Association :*

I want to express in this public way my very high appreciation of the honor which you have conferred upon me by inviting me to be present at this your Sixty-second Annual Meeting, and to make one of the addresses. I have been asked to speak on "The Progress and Development of the Colored People of Our Nation." The subject is an interesting one, but so much has already been said on it from the rostrum and through the papers and magazines that it is rather a hazardous thing to attempt to discuss it in the hope of holding the attention of an audience. I shall endeavor, however, since I have been asked to speak on it, to do so for a little while, not because I have anything new to offer, but simply with a view of helping to keep alive the interest that is already felt.

The words progress, development, are themselves great words, inspiring words,—words that cannot be associated with any race without leading that race to feel that there is an outlook for it, that the future is not all dark. The very idea of progress, of development injected into the consciousness of a race gives that race hope and becomes a source of constant inspiration to it. I want the colored people of this country, as they think of themselves, to hold fast to this great idea of progress, of development; and I want the white people of this country, as they think of the millions of colored people in it, also to hold fast to this idea as applicable to the colored people as well as to themselves. I believe that God, who made of one blood all the races of mankind, and who made man in His image, has put within each individual, and within all the races of mankind, made up of individuals, the possibilities of progress, of development; and that the same is true of the Negro, of the colored people in the United States and throughout the world. Not only are human beings capable of development, but every living thing that God has made possesses the same capabilities. Everywhere we see evidences of the great

law of evolution. There is nothing unseemly, therefore, nothing inappropriate in the use of these words, progress, development, as applied to the colored people in this country, as they are a part of the human race. We are not left to mere *a priori* considerations, however, in establishing the possibilities of the colored people for growth, for development: the last forty years of their history in this country have gloriously demonstrated that fact. And this is the first point in this discussion to which I desire to direct attention,—to the simple fact that the colored people in this country have progressed, have developed since emancipation. Before that time there was little or no progress, but it was no fault of theirs; they were so circumstanced, so environed, as to render progress impossible. As soon, however, as the restrictions were removed the race began at once to move forward, and has gone on progressing ever since. This progress has been along various lines.

Materially, the race has gone forward. It is still poor, very poor, but its condition in this respect is very different from what it was forty years ago. It has increased its possessions by hundreds of millions of dollars, which, in view of all the circumstances, is a most creditable record. I will not take the time to give the figures, to enter into details; you know what the facts are, we all know.

Intellectually, the race has gone forward. Its growth here has indeed been marvelous. When we remember the dense ignorance of the race at the close of the war, and read the record today of the attendance of pupils of this race in the public schools; the number of colored teachers in these schools; the number of secondary and higher educational institutions, for this race conducted by various religious denominations, every one of which is crowded, and every one of which is sending out graduates every year; and when we think also of the fact that in nearly all the great universities in the North and West, as well as the smaller white colleges, representatives of this race are to be found, and found in increasing numbers, the change for the better in the condition of the race is manifest. There is still a course a great deal of ignorance among us; but the improvement has been wonderful. There are millions yet who cannot read and write, but think of the millions who can read and write; and the thousands upon thousands who can do more than read and write,—who are teaching in schools, colleges, universities; who are lawyers, doctors, and who are filling other positions of responsibility which require training, intelligence, education. Forty years ago how entirely different things were from what they are today!

Morally and spiritually, the race has gone forward. The number of churches organized, and the accessions to these churches during these forty years have been quite remarkable. The ministry has also grown, not only in numbers, but in efficiency; it is becoming better and better qualified each year to do effective work. There are hundreds and thousands of men today ministering in these churches who are well qualified to teach the people, to expound to them the word of God. Many of them are not only college-bred men, but, in addition, have been specially trained in theological seminaries. There has also been considerable improvement in the manner in which God is worshipped. The general character of the services, in many instances, has been improved. The order is better; there is less confusion, less noise, less tendency to emotional excesses; and I believe higher ideals are taking hold of some of the people, at least.

As I look back over these forty years, all along the line I see evidence of progress; I see, slowly it may be, but surely, the race moving onward and upward. It is not today in the same place where it was forty years ago; and the place which it occupies today is not a less desirable one, but a more desirable one; the place which it occupies today is not lower down the scale, but higher up. Everywhere I see evidences, not of deterioration, but of progress, of development. I am not saying, it is all bright; it isn't all bright, it wasn't to be expected that it would be so. How could it be all bright, in view of the antecedents of the race, with the degrading influences of two hundred and fifty years of slavery upon it? but what I am saying is, that in spite of this degrading past, with its long train of evils, since emancipation the face of the race has been set towards the light, towards better things. It has, as a matter of fact, gone forward; the leaven of improvement has been at work, and is still working. And in this fact I rejoice, and rejoice because it is a fact which no one can truthfully deny. Even if the progress was less than it has actually been it would still be ground for rejoicing, because however little is the forward movement, if it is really a forward movement, it is an encouraging sign, it shows the trend to be in the right direction. However slowly a race is moving on, if it is really moving on, there is no reason to despair of it; it will some day reach the goal.

With this incontestable fact before us,—the fact that the race has progressed during these forty years, I want in the next place to call attention to some of the forces that have helped to make this progress possible.

First among these forces, I place the fact that the colored man himself has wanted to go forward. And this is the more remarkable when we remember that the whole of the education which he received under slavery was designed to impress him with the fact that he was less than a man, that God made him to move in a certain sphere only, to be a servant of servants, a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, and that beyond that he was not to aspire. That was the education which he received day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year,—from the cradle to the grave. And yet, deep down, in the bottom of the heart of the slave, was the desire for something better; deep down in the bottom of his heart was the never-ending protest, put there by God himself, in the shape of aspirations which slavery would not tolerate and which it could not satisfy. Lowell says:

“When a deed is done for Freedom,
Through the broad earth’s aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling
on from East to West,
And the slave, where’er he cowers, feels
the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood.”

And deep down in the bottom of the soul of the slave was ever present this disposition to rise to the verge of manhood. He was never satisfied to be what his master wanted him to be; there was always the instinctive yearning for something better,—the feeling that he was created for something better, that he was capable of something better. The old slave system with all its rigor, its narrowing and benumbing influences, was never able to extinguish this spark of genuine aspiration within the slave. And so when freedom came, and the opportunity of gratifying this long-cherished desire was afforded, how the race, as it were, leaped forward to embrace it! Did ever a race before show such eagerness for education? Were parents ever more willing to make sacrifices for the education of their children? And the same is still true. Under the Revised Constitutions in the Southern States, it was supposed that colored people would be effectually shut out from the suffrage through ignorance, and those who were instrumental in getting up these constitutions chuckled over their success in eliminating the Negro from politics; but now we are beginning to hear an entirely different note. The statement is being made now by these very people that the colored people are taking more interest in the education of their children than the poor whites are, and that un-

less something is done the number of Negroes who can read and write and who will be entitled therefore to vote, will outnumber the whites. Whether this fear is well-grounded or not I am not prepared to say, but so far as it directs attention to the interest which the colored people feel in the education of their children, it is true. From the very beginning the colored man has himself always wanted to go forward; and in no particular is this more strikingly illustrated than in the interest he has taken in education. Without this desire on the part of the colored people themselves to go forward no progress would have been possible, the race would be no further on today than when it emerged from slavery. The fact that it has moved forward is due largely, and I do not think too much emphasis can be laid upon it, to this desire on the part of the race itself to improve its condition. It is a great thing for an individual or a race to possess a spirit of divine unrest, the disposition to be ever reaching out for larger and better things. And this I believe is true of this race. It is an aspiring race; it is a race that is conscious of a great many needs, and that is still reaching out for many things, and this desire for enlargement is not diminishing, but is steadily increasing. The progress that the race has already made has had a stimulating effect upon it; the more it gets, the more it wants; the more it possesses of wealth, of education, of the things that ennoble, the more it wants of them. And as long as this continues to be true of it there will be no backward step; as long as it wants to go forward, it will continue to go forward, as long as it wants to improve it will continue to improve.

Second among the forces that have helped to make this progress possible I place the kindly sympathy that has ever been manifested by our white friends, and the efforts they have put forth to assist us, represented in the work that has been carried on by the various religious denominations and by individual donors among us during all these years. Even before the war closed, the great philanthropic heart of the North began to devise ways and means for the uplift of this race, and when peace came how many hundreds of the best men and women of the North poured into the South and gave themselves to the work of education! I do not believe that in the history of the world, there ever went into a needy field a nobler band of men and women than those who went into the South at the close of the war for work among the freedmen. And I believe still further, that in estimating the forces that have helped to make the progress of these forty years possible too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the type of white men and women with whom this race first came in contact in its efforts to rise, and the type

of men and women who have largely had control of the great philanthropic movements for its uplift,—the men and women who have touched the race most closely in our schools, colleges, universities,—men and women who really wanted to help the race, and to help it, not because of what they could get out of it, but because of a real interest in it, who were willing to become all things unto it in order that if by any means they might be helpful to it. The boys and girls, the young men and women who came in contact with these early missionaries and teachers never can forget them; nor can the impression made upon them ever be effaced. Nothing that has come to the race since has been a greater blessing to it than these first and earliest impressions that were made upon it by these early missionaries, by these men and women who came straight from God, to the work. The spirit of these early missionaries and teachers still survives in some of the men and women who are still laboring in the southern field, who are still teaching in the schools, colleges, universities, for which we are profoundly thankful; and, I may say, in passing, that just in proportion as men and women of the type of these earlier men and women continue to dominate these institutions will they be useful as factors in the development of this race.

The kind of education that the Negro needs, in addition to training his head, and hand, and heart, is one that will develop his manhood, as well: and he never can get that, if the men and women who teach him, with whom he daily comes in contact in the school room do not deep down in the bottom of their hearts recognize him as a man, and treat him as a man. This was true of the men and women with whom the race came in contact in the early days of freedom; and it must still be true of the men and women who are working among them, if the efforts that are being put forth today, are to be equally fruitful of good.

All of the great religious denominations of the country have had a hand in this work of development, have been contributing factors in making possible the splendid results of these forty years; but of them all, and I am saying this not because I am speaking under your auspices, not because I am the guest of this Association, but because I really believe it,—of them all the contribution which you have made, in my judgment has been of most value. You have not only planted schools and churches, and have sought in every possible way to train the head and heart and hand of the race, but more than any other organization you have recognized the manhood of the Negro in all your dealings with him, you have more largely than any other organization, so far as I know, treated

him as a man and a brother. You have been swayed less than any other organization, so far as I know, by colorphobia. And, so far as I am concerned, I am free to say, I attach more importance to that aspect of your work than to any other.

What is needed in this country, as the supreme educational factor, not only for the black man but for the white man as well, is a Christianity that believes in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man ; not white men, but all men ; that not only preaches that God is no respecter of persons; that in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but that lives it; a Christianity that not only theoretically recognizes the evil of race prejudice, but that practically sets itself against it in every shape and form. The one, great, supreme educational force that the world needs today more than any other, is a Christianity that breathes the spirit of Christ, really, truly. And I believe, of all the organizations that have been working among us as a race, your great Association has shown most of the spirit of what I call true, genuine Christianity. In an address which I delivered in 1903, entitled "God and the Race Problem," I said among other things :

"I regard no man as a friend of the race, I care not what his profession may be, or how much money he may give for Negro education, if by word or act he denies the essential equality of the Negro as a man, if he looks upon him and treats him as an inferior being belonging to a lower order of creation than himself ; if he thinks that the Negro ought to be satisfied with less than a white man is satisfied with; that there are things that white men may aspire to that Negroes have no right to aspire to, if such is his attitude towards the Negro, I care not what he may think to himself or what others may think of him, I class him among the enemies of the race, among those who are seeking, consciously or unconsciously, to break down in the Negro that which is most essential to his true development,—his self-respect. Look upon a man as an inferior, treat him as an inferior, encourage others to treat him as an inferior, and it doesn't make any difference how much you may do for him under the guise of philanthropy you can never repair the injury that you do him. If you want to help him, if you are really his friend, you will treat him in a way to stimulate his self-respect, to encourage every noble aspiration within him." And this is what I believe; this is the gospel that I preach. The only kind of Christianity to which I attach any importance whatever is a Christianity that practically recognizes the manhood and brotherhood of the Negro, and of all other races.

Every other brand of it to me is spurious. And this is why I say I attach more importance to the spirit in which you have administered the great trust which has been committed to your Association than to anything else. It has not only been an inspiration to the colored people, it has not only encouraged them to hold their heads up, but has also been a splendid example to the Christian churches of this land, whether it has been heeded or not. If our Christian churches were what they claim to be, if they were true to the principles of the religion of Jesus Christ, things would be very much better than they are. There is need, not only in dealing with the Negro problem, but in dealing with all other problems, that the visible church,—the men and women who are the representatives of Jesus Christ, should stand up squarely and uncompromisingly for Christian principles, which I am afraid we haven't been doing. How is the fact to be accounted for that with nearly 200,000 Christian churches in this land, and with over 250,000 ministers of the gospel, and with nearly 30,000,000 professing Christians, members of these churches, race prejudice, with all its attendant evils, has gone on steadily increasing year by year? What is the trouble? Is it because there is no power in Christianity, or is it because these churches are Christless, because they are not true to Christian principles? I am not going to discuss the question, I simply raise it as one that is worthy of serious consideration. There are some things that the men and women who make up the church of Jesus Christ ought to grapple with, and one of them is race prejudice. It is the greatest single evil of today in the United States, and the religious sentiment of the country has been powerless to check it because it has made no serious effort to do so, because it has never concerned itself very much about it. Where it has not directly encouraged it, it has dealt with it in a timid, cowardly spirit. Instead of lifting up a standard for the people, it has been only too willing to follow the standard which an unbelieving, non-Christian world has set up. Such has not been the case however with this Association. Take for example, the little periodical that you publish, *THE AMERICAN MISSIONARY*. I know of no magazine in the country in which the Negro question is discussed more intelligently, more sympathetically, more courageously, or on higher Christian principles. It is never afraid to touch the question, or to speak out frankly, fearlessly for the Negro, not because he is a Negro, but because he is a man and brother. It never stops to ask whether, what it is about to say is acceptable to a Negro-hating public sentiment or not. Its aim has not been to placate

such a sentiment, to express itself in such a way as to give no offense to such a sentiment, but to lift up a standard for the people, a standard which reflects not the spirit of race hatred, the spirit of caste, but the spirit of Jesus Christ. Wherever this magazine has gone it has carried this gospel of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; it has revealed the spirit of the men who have spoken through it, and it has shown that they were men who fully believed in the Negro as a man and brother.

Third : In this work of development, I want to say, that in my judgment, the chief emphasis ought to be placed upon the *moral* and *spiritual* rather than upon the material or even the merely intellectual. If this race is to grow strong, if it is to carve out for itself a great and honorable future, it must be *sound morally*. Whatever else it may have, if it is deficient here, if it is not grounded in the great and immutable principles of morality, it is doomed. Without character, without a sound moral basis we are building on the sand.

“Who steals my purse, steals trash;
But he, who filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.”

In proportion as the race realizes the truth of this; in proportion as the men and women who are engaged in the work of training this race realize it; in proportion as this great idea of the supreme value of character takes hold of the hearts and minds of the fathers and mothers of this race, will its future be insured. I am interested in all forms of education, and in all forms of race enterprises, but I have been afraid at times that too much emphasis has been placed upon money getting, upon amassing wealth, upon having bank accounts,—not too much *absolutely*, but too much *relatively*, in comparison to the emphasis that has been put upon *higher* things. To dress in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day; to be able to pull down barns and build greater ones in which to bestow one's goods may be all right: it is all right, but these are not the *supreme things* in life, these are not *the things* around which the activities of a race should mainly centre,—*the things* that it should covet *most*, in which its highest aspirations should terminate. And the education that this race needs *most* is the education that will impress that fact upon it. My greatest concern for the race has been and still is, that it shall be morally sound; that the men and women who are growing up and who are to be fathers and mothers of those who are to follow shall be of the right stamp; that the men and women who are

to preside over the homes of this race, where the children are to be trained, shall be God-fearing men and women who realize fully their responsibilities as parents. I confess I haven't concerned myself over-much about whether financially this race shall produce any Astors, and Vanderbilts, and Carnegies, and Rockefellers, or not; but from the bottom of my heart I have wished that there might be many, many, moral and spiritual Astors, and Vanderbilts, and Rockefellers, and Carnegies; many moral and spiritual millionaires and multi-millionaires. This is the kind of riches that I crave most for this race; the kind of riches that I want it to possess most of; the kind of greatness that I want it to be most distinguished for. Whether it ever becomes rich or not in material things, I want it to be rich in faith, and in love for the things that are true, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report,—rich in the great qualities of the heart and mind that alone can make an individual or a race great, in the true sense of the term. *Make this race sound morally*; let it be firmly planted on the indestructible principles of morality; make it a thoroughly religious race, with the fear and love of God at the centre of its life, and we need have no fears for it; it cannot fail; it *must* succeed, it must go forward.

Fourth: In closing, there are just three things more that I want to take just a moment to say:

(1). The progress that the colored people have made during the last forty years is the race's answer to the oft-repeated and ever-recurring charge of inferiority. There is nothing in that record that indicates inferiority. In THE AMERICAN MISSIONARY for June, I find this statement, taken from an address of Bishop Bratton, on the race question, delivered at the Southern Educational Conference at Memphis, Tenn.:

"The more I study the great problem, the less able am I to see the end of its progressive solution. Only a few things seem to me to stand out clearly and distinctly above the dust clouds." And among those mentioned by him is: "That the Negro is capable of development to a point whose limit I have not yet discovered." And this judgment of the good bishop is based upon the record of these last forty years. In that record there is no evidence of a lack of capacity to follow in the wake of other races. Even Dr. Lyman Abbott, who will not be charged with having any special bias in favor of the race, says: "Never in the history of man has a race made such educational and material progress in forty years as the American Negro."

(2). The progress that the colored people have made during the last forty years ought to be an encouragement to the friends of the race who have labored among them, and who have contributed of their means to help carry on the work among them, to continue to lend a hand. Your labors have not been in vain, the contributions that you have made have not been wasted, thrown away, even what you have given for higher education, as is sometimes asserted. Great good has been accomplished; the race has responded nobly to your efforts in its behalf. It has shown its appreciation of what you have done by the manner in which it has applied itself, by the eagerness with which it has embraced the opportunities which your generosity and kindly spirit of personal service have afforded them. The results fully justify every dollar expended, every noble life that has gone into the work of these forty years. And what I want to say, in this connection, is, be not weary in well doing. The race still needs your help; there is still a great deal to be done; the fields are still white for the harvest; you can still be of help; there is still need for workers, and for financial aid in carrying on the good work.

(3). The progress that the colored people have made during the last forty years has in it also a lesson for the enemies of the race. It ought to make them ashamed of themselves to continue to put obstacles in the way of a race that is struggling as earnestly as this race is doing to make something of itself. It ought also to convince them, that the task in which they are engaged is a futile one. In spite of their hostility the race is moving on just the same. Its progress may be retarded, but it cannot be permanently arrested by their opposition. Fortunately the question as to whether an individual or a race shall go forward is not left entirely to be settled by outsiders; the individual himself, the race itself, has something to say about it: and this race, if I understand its spirit and temper, has made up its mind to go forward. And by the grace of God, and by your continued help, and by its own energy and push it is going forward. "The gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it."

I wish that the Negro-haters of this country, North as well as South, would make a careful study of this record of forty years of progress. It would do them good; it would be an eye-opener to them. I do not believe that they could go over that record, calmly, dispassionately, impartially, taking into consideration all the circumstances, and come out of it without a change of heart, without losing their hatred; and without feeling for the race at least, some sympathy, and some little degree of admiration. The col-

ored people are not all that they ought to be by any means; but is there any other race anywhere on this globe, under similar circumstances, that would be any better? This record, with all its defects, entitles it, at least, to the sympathy, the encouragement, the hearty Godspeed of all. In the face of this record and the record of the two hundred and fifty years of slavery lying back of it, any man of any race, and especially of the dominant race in this country, ought to be ashamed of himself not to want to lend a hand, ought to be ashamed of himself even to think of putting any additional obstacles in the way of the race's progress.

“Out of the wilderness, out of the night,
Has the black man crawled to the dawn of light;
Beaten by lashes and bound by chains,
A beast of burden with soul and brains,
He has come through sorrow and need and woe,
And the cry of his heart is to know, to know.”

The way upward, as Tennyson has expressed it, is

**** “on the stepping stones
Of our dead selves to higher things.”

And it is this self, not yet dead but dying, begotten in slavery and nourished under its degrading influences, that this black race is seeking to rise above, to free itself from. And we want you to help us in the future as you have done in the past and are still doing. We shall endeavor to prove ourselves worthy of your sympathy and support.